LABlearning evaluation

Evaluation of the youth dimension
A guide for the partners and the LABs mentors and teachers

PART 1
COMMON PLATFORM

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The LABlearning evaluation framework is split into two documents:
Part 1 is the Common Platform on which all evaluation should be based, and Part 2 offers inspiration and guidance as to HOW to evaluate and informs about WHEN to evaluate.
Part 1 is mandatory: *we must all evaluate on the basis of this common platform*;
the Part 2 evaluation tools are voluntary, meaning that they serve as inspiration.
The evaluation and documentation activities are closely linked to the LAB[reporter] and LAB[journalist] roles.

Introduction

This document is aimed at all those involved in the documentation and evaluation of activities and outcomes in the LABlearning project and is based on the previous one "LABlearning evaluation – From application to reality" (May 2012).

After some background information, section 1 "What", lists fewer "expectations" than before about project outcomes, which have also been better defined and explained. For each one of them examples are provided of what can be "observed" in the LABs to assess whether they are "happening" or not.

Section 2 "Who and how" illustrates the roles in evalution and documentation activities and suggests some tools that can be used for documentation purposes.

Section 3 "When" presents the two key documentation outputs expected to be produced in the first phase of the project (until time out).

In the preparation of this document crucial contributions have been received by partners Danielle Martin about the ICCN experience, Elmo De Angelis about the reAct project and Enzo Zecchi about the LEPIDA Scuola experience.

Background: LABlearning approach and the laboratories

The principles of LABlearning media-based learning approach

LABlearning is proposing to young people (YP) –especially disadvantaged ones- a new way of learning, that the YouthVoice process[1] found to be even difficult to imagine by most of them.

This new way of learning can be summarized as follows:

- driven by personal interest, talents and aspirations, including concerns for social issues;
- based on authentic problem /project-based / collaboration approaches to learning (ideally tapping into, and addressing also broader community resources and needs);
- stimulating/expecting a different use of the media they are familiar with (for creative production, in/out of school continuum etc.) and the exploration of additonal technologies;
- with a different role for teachers (acting more as mentors), the contribution of media experts and other local community members.

Fejl! Henvisningskilde ikke fundet. illustrates the LABlearning principles in more details.

Testing the approach with young people in the LABs

Some LABlearning partners (called LAB partners in other project documents, but just "partners" here) will tryout this learning approach through six "learning laboratories" called LABs, set up in four EU countries[2] where they will apply and adapt the above principles to their specific circumstances. The LABs will promote media-based activities, identified and designed jointly with the participants, to be carried out over a number of months in late 2012 and 2013 (in some cases corresponding to the whole 2012-13 school year). Mentors and teachers (M&T), media experts and other community people are expected to be involved. The project envisages a first phase of activity; a time out for reflection and evaluation of this first experience; and a second phase in which changes may be introduced in the LABs as a result of the intermediate reflection. The changes may concern the LABs activities, but also the evaluation approach itself, which should thus be viewed as a work-in-progress.

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[1] YouthVoice was an activity in the early stage of the LABlearning project where informal dialogues were held with young people in the different LABs locations. In these meetings, partners gathered the YPs' experiences and ideas about learning at school, out of school and with the use on technology.

[2] LABs are organised in Denmark (1), Italy (2), Netherlands (1) and Spain (2). Other LABlearning partners with other roles in the project are based in Bulgaria, Spain (the coordinatori), Switzerland, and Turkey.

What: expectations about LABs activities and outcomes

Evaluation in LABlearning

The LABlearning evaluation approach has to be flexible. It has to match the different kinds of LABs resulting from the application of the above principles to different circumstances (formal /informal education, national regulations etc.), different types of young people (by age, socio-economic background and education status), of teachers and mentors (pedagogical views and experience) and other factors.

Also, we do not know in advance whether the activities/projects developed in the LABs will go through a full start-completion cycle (or even more) within each project phase; will span across the two phases; or do both things. The evaluation approach is designed to cope with all these occurences.

The evaluation of the YOUTH dimension will address two broad sub-dimensions: changes occurring among the young participants and the "quality" of LABs didactics from which such changes are deemed to stem. The evaluation will be done by comparing the expectations illustrated below and in Table 1 with evidence about their materialization drawn from the LABs.

This very important "documentation process" will rely for each learning laboratory on the fundamental contribution of one LAB Reporter (from the LAB staff) and one LAB Journalist, from each LAB partner. This is well illustrated in **Fejl! Henvisningskilde ikke fundet.**.

The evaluation's main aim is thus to find out whether "things" hoped for/expected to happen during the project and as a result of it, will actually happen.

Expectations about young people outcomes

Interest and motivation in learning. The crucial and ultimate expectation is that the direct experience in the LABs with a different way of learning from that they have known before, will start producing a change of mentality among the YP w.r.t. to what learning can be and mean to their life. This should come along with greater self-esteem and self-confidence, leading to a renewed, stronger motivation towards pursuing further learning/education opportunities.

1.	The young people demonstrate an increasing interest and involvement in the learning processes during the LABs activities
2.	The young people demonstrate increasing self-esteem and self-confidence
3.	The young people demonstrate a change in their general attitude towards learning and related "hard work", and towards education in general

Media creativity. The positive experience in LABs activities should stem from a novel practice with technology and a favourable atmosphere and context for learning (assessed in the Labs didactics sub-dimension). Thanks to these, YP are expected to diversify and enrich their use of media from primarily or exclusively entertainment and personal communication purposes to creative production purposes. For this to occur, learning is needed and is expected to take place in technology fluency and other areas such as: teamwork, collaboration and social competence; problem solving, design and project management; self-expression and communication.

4.	The young people are able to use technology for creative production
5.	The young people are able to explore, learn about and use (including in unexpected ways) a variety of media tools in their projects and teams
6.	The young people are able to better express themselves and communicate in new ways

Community interaction. A positive contribution from LABs activities to enhanced learning, sense of belonging, self-esteem, social competence and social capital, should come from tackling authentic needs and problems, and drawing on resources from the local community. YP are expected to develop: greater abilities in interacting with surrounding people and professionals; a clearer understanding of the role and value of these "assets" for achieving their goals; and an increasing interest in making/giving something useful to their local community.

7.	The young people are increasingly able to establish contacts to people and professionals in the surrounding community in their projects
8.	The young people demonstrate an increasing understanding of the values of community interaction in support of their work tasks and their learning
9.	The young people show an increasing interest in making their work useful to people in the community

Expectations about LABs didactics

LABs didactics –i.e. the translation into practice of the principles illustrated above- qualifies the LABlearning approach and is expected to play a crucial role at determining its outcomes.

There are of course other important factors at play, such as the <u>institutional and organisational conditions</u> of education in the partners' countries and localities and the characteristics of the <u>young people</u> involved in the LABs. These aspects will have to be captured and taken into account in the evaluation.

The evaluation of laboratory didactics refers to the assessment of the extent to which the pedagogical and other principles of the LABlearning approach will be put into practice by M&T in the LABs, and the identification of the obstacles faced in doing it. For this again a comparison will be made between expectations and the evidence gathered from the LABs. In line with those about youth outcomes, these expectations are:

10. The human resources in the laboratories have enacted pedagogical principles that foster motivation, learning and creative production among the young people

11. The laboratories are able to offer the young people a variety of relevant media tools and adequate conditions for their use

12. The laboratories are able to link the projects to the community and to interact with relevant players outside the laboratories

Table 1 - Expectations about youth outcomes and labs didactics

Youth motivation and interest in learning

Expectations	Explanation
	LAB activities will offer the YP opportunities to "make things", socialize, explore new technical tools … in ways which entail learning as part of the process, and not always easy learning:. LAB activities will be designed to be "hard fun". As proof that this offer is working, we expect YP to show interest in this learning experience, reflected into growing involvement and participation into the LABs activities.
1. The young people demonstrate an increasing interest and involvement in the learning processes during the LABs activities	Observable aspects to document are: — the YP attendance in LABs activities and the intensity/duration of their presence — their ability to sustain involvement in learning activities for longer periods — the active participation in LABs tasks and related enjoyment(shown or declared) — the evolution of effort and roles played in the activities (so called "trajectories of participation") from more passive and peripheral positions to more active and central ones Attendance may depend on LABs organisation and rules. YP may or may not be able to choose if to attend LABs activities and for how long. Attendance tracking tools used by M&T should provide evidence of quantitative aspects of participation (including drop-out rates).
2. The young people demonstrate increasing self-esteem and self-confidence	Increased self-esteem and confidence - and agency to follow on own interests- are expected to stem from several processes and events such as: reaching the goals set in a project by the YP; being effective in presenting them and receiving a positive feedback from others; getting encouragement and support by M&T and peers in addressing setbacks; and so on. Observable aspects to document are: — the change in youth perceptions of their self-esteem and confidence and their awareness and agency to follow on own interests — the processes and events like those mentioned above that are deemed relevant as change drivers
3. The young people demonstrate a change in their general attitude towards learning and related "hard work", and towards education in general	This expectation refers to a broader change of mentality, beyond the specific LAB experience (see expectation 1), w.r.t. the role/value of learning in YPs' life: from "It's not for me. I am not good for it!" before, to "It can be important to me. I can make it!", afterwards. This change is expected to stem from a positive experience made by the YP in the LABs -which should prove to them that learning "can be different"- and from the YPs' personal development (see expectation 2) leading them to feel that learning can also be for them. Observable aspects to document are: — the change in youth discourse towards school, learning and education in general — the youth "sense of" and expectations about the future — the youth "satifaction" with their LABs experience

Expectations

Media creativity

4. The young people are able to use technology for creative production

5. The young people are able to explore, learn about and use (including in unexpected ways) a variety of media tools in their projects and teams

Explanation

This expectation refers to the diversification and enrichment of technology use by the YP. A consumeristic attitude and strictly entertainment and personal communication purposes typically dominate media practice among YP. The expected shift should be toward the "production of something" that reflects the interest, talents and aspirations of the creator/s. The LABs will offer several opportunities to undertake creative production activities. This evolution in technology use is desired because it stimulates and entails acquiring important abilities (see other expectations below) and should contribute to the change of YPs' motivation and interest in learning discussed before.

Observable aspects to document this outcome are:

— the products, material and other evidence from the young people's projects

— the reflections that YP will make about the character, motivations and purposes of their projects/results, including in public presenations

This expectation refers to what is also known as "technology fluency", i.e. the capability of using existing resources and developing the additional skills required for applying technology in projects and towards goals which users find interesting and valuable. Technological fluency is developed by learning other complex skills beyond technical ones, such as: the ability to learn collaboratively; problem solving and project management skills; self-expression and communication abilities; learning to learn.

Observable aspects to document this evolution are:

— the breadth of technology use (i.e.the range of different technical activities YP engage with, and tools they use); their learning achievements; and unexpected outcomes: "I never thought I could reach that" ...be that an acquired skill or a product feature

— the reflections that YP will make about the technical activities they engage with, the tools they use and their learning experience, including in particular with respect to peer support and collaboration in technology learning

— what will be said/showed abouth these aspects in the presentations that YP will make about their projects/results

— technology use related to LABs tasks taking place not just in the school/educational context but also in a continuum with other situations

Expectations

6. The young people are able to better express themselves and communicate in new ways

Community interaction

7. The young people are increasingly able to establish contacts with people and professionals in the surrounding community that can make a positive contribution to their projects

8. The young people show an increasing interest in making their work useful to people in the community

Lab didactics

9. The human resources in the laboratories have enacted pedagogical principles that foster motivation, learning and creative production among the young people

Explanation

LABlearning puts much emphasis on creative expression/production (as many results might consist of media content of some sort, a video, an art work etc.) and on the communication by YP of project ideas, reflections, results etc. hence on the development of the very skills that make them possible. On the other hand, the use of new media in LABlearning is expected to support and enable the YP in expressing themselves in more creative ways and communicating more effectively. For these reasons, expression and communication skills (among other Life or 21st Century skills) are highlighted and specifically addressed in the evaluation.

Improvements in these dimensions can be observed similarly to expectation 4 and 5 - they are after all an important component of creative production and (collaborative) technology learning/use - in:

– what the products, material and other evidence from the young people's projects show about their expression and communication abilities

– the content and medium used for the reflections that YP will make about their LABs experience

– most of all, the presentations that YP will make about their LABs experience, as communication abilities are a fundamental aspect of these deliverables/events

LABs activities are expected to stimulate and encourage YP to look for and take advantage of external resources that may bring useful input to their media projects. This expectation thus refers to the development and application of YP abilities in searching, making contact and carrying on effective relationships with professionals and other people living in the local community and beyond (important links may also be established at a distance throught the Internet). This evolution implicitly reflects a growing acknowledgement by YP of the value of such relationships.

Observable aspects to document this evolution are:

– the breadth (number and variety) and depth (intensity) of involvement of external resources in YP projects

This expectation refers to the growth promoted by LABlearning among YP of authentic problem solving abilities and constructive social awareness. These can be developed by applying the YPs' efforts and skills in addressing substantive (usuallycomplex) social and other issues which affect the community where they live, rather than artifical tasks.

Observable aspects to document this evolution are:

– the interaction (especially in the project definition phase) with people in the community to understand their problems and needs

– the nature of goals ultimately set by YP to their projects

– the involvement of local community members in the presentation of project results and feedback gathering processes

This expectation refers in particular to the following principles:[3]

– Mutual trust and respect - participants in the LABs should feel confident that their ideas, contributions, and comments are treated with respect (this engenders self-esteem of the YP who have most of the time a poor image of themselves as learners)

– Relevance -participants in the LABs should as far as possible be allowed to define their project and learning goals w.r.t. what they find relevant in life

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[3] The principles and their illustration have been extracted from LABlearning project documents and from the reAct project's Evaluation Framework.

Expectations

Explanation

— Challenge and support - participants in the LABs should face challenging, but manageable tasks. Failure should be accepted and learning from mistakes encouraged

— Self-guidance -participants in the LABs should be allowed as much self-guidance and self-directed learning as possible. Patience and asking questions rather than providing assignments are key ingredients for this

— Ownership - participants in the LABs should feel that they are in control of the learning they do and have a sense of ownership (this should stem much from the previous three principles)

— Collaboration and sharing -participants in the LABs should be prompted and supported in working with others and sharing openly what they do and learn

— Reciprocal relationship where participants are both teachers and learners should be acknowledged and encouraged

The application of these principles is expected to shape the "atmosphere", rules and organisation of LABs activities; the goals and execution of YP projects; the relationships among participants and most other aspects of the LABs. For this reason, attention to the application of these principles and to the likely obstacles faced will be included across all project documentation processes.

In particular, M&T will be asked to consider/refer to these aspects as systematically as possible in the documentation of their activities and in their reflections. Interviews with M&T addressing specifically these aspects are also envisaged.

The point of view of YP on these aspects is also very important and should emerge from their reflections and interviews.

10. The laboratories are able to offer the young people a variety of relevant media tools and adequate conditions for their use

Providng YP with a rich and fully operational mix of technical tools and services for creative production is a fundamental aspect of the LABlearning approach.

Observable aspects to document this expectation are:

— the mix of media tools available in the LABs

— the presence of conditions needed for their regular and full operation, in particular: timely technical assistance, adequate broadband connectivity, access from the LABs premises to relevant online services (e.g. social networks)

11. The laboratories are able to link the projects to the community and to interact with relevant players outside the laboratories

The openness of the LABs activities and the promotion of exchanges with the local community are also important features of the LABlearning approach.

Observable aspects to document this expectation are:

— the inclusion of community members in LABs activities

— the organisation of outreach activities and visits in the community

— the establishment of some form of collaboration with external organisations

Roles in documentation and evaluation

LABlearning's core evaluation will be done by comparing the initial expectations with a variety of documentation from the LAB's. Documenting in an effective way the LABs didactics, the activities undertaken by the YP and their results, the changes stimulated and enabled by them, is thus crucial for a successful evaluation.

In order to achieve this, as illustrated in **Fejl! Henvisningskilde ikke fundet.**, for each LAB there will be:

— an internal "team reporter" called the LAB^{reporter} who plans the documentation initiatives in collaboration with the LAB^{journalist}, inspires and guides the M&T and the young teams to contribute to those activities, and <u>collects</u> the material produced;

— a person from the partner organization called LAB^{journalist} who works closely with the LAB^{reporter} to ensure a fluent communication of material from the LABs to the project. The LAB^{journalist} <u>elaborates</u> on and <u>organizes</u> the material in a useful way –in particular by summarizing and translating it into English- and <u>forwards</u> it to the project level. The elaborated material from the LABs is intended to reach the project's evaluation team, communication platform and website.

The <u>evaluation team</u> is made of the project's coordinator, the quality assurance expert, the Danish support partner and two representatives from the non-LAB partners. Its task is to perform the evaluation's analytical process –i.e. comparing LABs documentation with the expectations and making sense of the results (how should we understand them, which might be the reasons behind them etc.) – and writing the evaluation reports. This will be done a first time at the project's mid-term break, and then towards the end of LABs activities. In this process, the LAB^{journalists} will be consulted and will also attend the two <u>transnational evaluation and reflection meetings</u> planned at the end of each phase.